14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

Every one helps in the work of the harvest, for the 243
stalks must be cut down and the heads cut off and placed
upon a rack which has been placed in the yard for that
purpose. The grains of dura are pounded out, then it [422]
becomes the property of the housewife after the seed dura
has been selected and stored for the coming year.

The stalks of dura are often kept for fuel or for making [372]
fences.

If the rainy season has started early there may be a
second crop of dura, but this seldom happens.

The wife must pound the dura and sift it to get the 252
bran out. She pounds it in a hole in the ground which she
has plastered with mud, using a long pole. She usually
chants a song as she pounds, the thud of the pounding
serving as a low accompaniment to her song.

The dura is cooked like mush and forms the main part
of the food of a Nuer. He eats it without salt or sugar;
sometimes he has a little milk on it. Or the dura may be
soaked and then allowed to sour a little, and then cooked,
in order to give the family a little variety in their
meals.

Corn is also eaten, usually being parched. They also 242
chew the dura stalk or the sugar-cane stalk (if they have
it) for the sugar they find in them.

Some wild tubers are eaten, and some kinds of wild
greens. Beans are also eaten, but I know of no Nuer who
plants them in his own village. Men consider these wild
greens effeminate and will not eat them except in times of
famine. Sometimes in times of famine they gather certain [268]
wild grass seeds and cook them as a food.

The Nuer is not inclined to plant any large field and 262
thus be assured of a surplus of food. The Arab merchant 437
comes to his village when the dura is threshed and shows
such an array of beads and cloths that the Nuer is tempted

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
F322 Nuer F322

THE SACRIFICIAL ROLE OF CATTLE

The very special circumstances in which cattle are killed for food are times of severe famine and in what are called *nak*, or in some parts of Nuerland *kenar* or *cuol*, camps. Within my own short experience, in 1931, a year of great hunger, the Lou Nuer killed many oxen for food, and during a famine in western Nuerland in 1935 a great number of beasts were slaughtered to keep the people alive. Dr. Howell says that in the Zeraf valley in 1943, likewise a year of famine, animals were being killed for food.[1] The Lou Nuer even have a reputation, of which they are ashamed, for killing oxen when hungry, for not waiting, that is, till faced with starvation. How often this situation used to occur is not, and cannot, be known. If it is not altogether a modern phenomenon, we may suppose that it was much less likely to have arisen before rinderpest depleted the herds and imposed peace prevented their rehabilitation through raiding, the milk supply thus being lessened.[2] *Nak* camps are presumably so called because they are formed for the express purpose of killing (*nak*) oxen. They are formed in some years only, in the rains or at the commencement of the dry season, by youths, each of whom takes an ox to the camp where one by one they are slaughtered and the young men gorge themselves on their flesh. Now that cattle have become scarcer two youths may share a single animal, though it is still thought that there ought to be an ox to a man. There is some doubt about the precise significance of this custom. When I published an account of the Nuer age-set system[3] I considered that it did not form an integral part of the rites of initiation but was only incidentally connected with them. I may have been wrong in this conclusion, and my own later researches revealed features which incline me to accept Dr. Howell's contention that they are connected with the age-set system.[4] Certainly there is more in the *nak* than merely killing oxen for feasting. That it has a ritual significance is clear from the fact that the youths who take part in it are segregated. Girls are not allowed to enter, or at any rate to sleep in, the camps. Abstinence is imposed at a time when the company of girls and their favours are a Nuer's chief interest. Nor may the

[1] P. P. Howell, 'The Age-tax System and the Institution of "Nak" among the Nuer' (with a Note by E. E. Evans-Pritchard), *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1948, p. 180. I was told that no cattle on the Dinka pilliped were slaughtered for food.

[2] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 1940, pp. 19–20.

[3] 'The Nuer Age-Sets', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1936.

[4] P. P. Howell, *ibid.*